



LETTER
TO THE
RT. HON. EARL GREY,

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S MOST HONORABLE
PRIVY COUNCIL,
AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COLONIAL AFFAIRS;

Embracing

A STATEMENT OF FACTS

IN RELATION TO

Emigration to Canada,

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1847.

BY THE HON. ADAM FERRIE,

Member of the Legislative Council,
CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE LAY COMMISSION FOR
EMIGRATION, ETC.

MONTREAL:

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF "THE PILOT."

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LETTER
TO
THE RIGHT HONORABLE EARL GREY,
&c. &c. &c.

MY LORD :

In bringing to your notice any communication connected with the honour and interests of Her Majesty's Government, and the wholesome administration of those colonial enactments which have been ordained for the happiness and prosperity of the people of this Province, I am sure I but anticipate the anxious desire of your Lordship on this, as on all occasions to give to such subjects your ready attention and your favourable considerations. But when to such inducements is superadded the fact that the subject of this letter involves the claims of a common humanity, and the exercise of that "even-handed justice" which metes out alike to every man the measure of its requirements, I am encouraged to hope that it will not only awaken your sympathies, but invoke the speedy interposition of that clemency

and patriotism which are the prominent attributes of your Lordship's enlarged and liberal mind.

The subject of Emigration, as connected with this Province, and the transfer of a large portion of the destitute population of the British Isles to these colonial shores, is doubtless familiar to your Lordship; and the dangers and difficulties which have attended such an enterprise cannot have escaped the penetration and discernment of your active and enquiring mind. In the rapid introduction, during the present year, of so large a portion of impoverished and helpless beings as were brought to our ports in crowded ships, and under circumstances in every way so unfavorable, fearful apprehensions were entertained that in such an assemblage of wretchedness and misery, disease and death would speedily acquire an ample field for their work of suffering and devastation. In the sad realization of these apprehensions, Canada, my Lord, has furnished a "bill of mortality" which, in her future history, will constitute an unwelcome and melancholy record of her wrongs, and furnish just cause of reproach to the names and memory of those at whose instance the inhuman sacrifice was accomplished. Fully sensible of the alarm which such a state of things had unavoidably created, and desirous that some suitable expression embo-

dying the general views of the people of this Province should be made known to the Imperial Government, I had the honour, in my seat in the Legislative Council, on two occasions, to move an Address to Her Most Gracious Majesty, which, having been voted, was forthwith addressed and forwarded.

I do not desire to offer your Lordship, in the present communication, any views or opinions which I may have formed as to the policy of those measures which have been adopted by Her Majesty's Government in relation to those emigrants who have been sent to Canada ; nor is it my intention to impugn the motives of those landed proprietors of the Mother Country, who have sought, through the great stream of emigration, to rid themselves of the burden of a worn out and unprofitable population, wholly destitute of that mental and physical exertion indispensable to useful labour and the success of honest industry.

I am, my Lord, wholly averse to any vain and useless exhibition before the public eye which might bring me forward as a prominent actor in those scenes of human wretchedness and degradation which, in the performance of my official duties, it has been my misfortune to witness. Nothing short of that imperious sense of duty, which all faithful and loyal subjects owe to the

honour and interests of their Sovereign, and to the weightier responsibilities of an enlightened humanity, could have induced the present appeal to the justice and clemency of your Lordship.

The public positions in which, by the favour of the Executive Government here, I have been placed, as Chairman of their Lay Commission, and, by the partiality of my fellow-citizens, as Chairman of the annually chosen Emigrant Committee, have enabled me, through an experience of nearly twenty years, to understand something of the plan of Emigration, as adopted by the Home Government and carried out by the regulations and provisions of our Colonial policy. A large portion of that time has been devoted to the interests and comforts of those who have, through untoward events, sought, in this land of their adoption, to improve their worldly means and to elevate their civil and political condition. Such, however, was the utter destitution and misery of a large portion of these misguided and ill-fated people on their arrival, that the unwearied ministrations of public charity and the resources of private benevolence fell far short of that alleviation which their immediate necessities so urgently demanded. Of the one hundred thousand men, women, and children, who sailed from the various ports of England.

Ireland and Scotland, to Canada, the greater part were sent off by the extensive landed proprietors of Ireland and their agents. I beg leave most respectfully to state to your Lordship that in the frequent intercourse had with the emigrants, I took occasion to question the adult portion of them, particularly the heads of families, as to the individuals under whose authority and direction they had been permitted to embark in such a defenceless and unprotected condition. The answer invariably was, that it had been done by one or the other of the parties above mentioned. When blamed for going on board those vessels, in which they sailed in such a state of debility and want, they gave for answer, that they were starving at home, and were induced to that step by being promised many advantages, which they had never realized. For instance, there have been this year about one thousand persons shipped off by the agents of Lord Palmerston, who not only promised them clothes, but they were assured that his Lordship had agents at Quebec, to whom instructions had been sent to pay them all from £2 to £5 each family, according to their numbers. On their arrival, however, no agents of his Lordship were to be found; and they were then thrown upon the bounty of the Government here, and the charitable donations of private

individuals. If his Lordship was aware of this most horrible and heartless conduct on the part of his Irish agents, and he one of the Ministers of the Crown, I dare not say what he would deserve. But that charity, my Lord, which "thinketh no evil," would teach me to hope that a nobleman of England, high in the confidence of Her Most Gracious Majesty, and sharing in the honourable administrations of her Government, could not so far forget that duty which he owed to God, his Sovereign, and his country ; but that it was the wanton and unauthorised act of worthless and unprincipled hirelings, in whose bosoms every principle of humanity and every germ of mercy had become totally extinct.

Many thousands of these unhappy beings have fallen victims to that cruel system of marine imprisonment which, in crowded vessels and the impure atmosphere of twixt decks, induces contagion and produces that endemial disease which so rapidly spreads over the mass of its congregated victims. Vast multitudes have died on the passage out, while a still greater proportion of them have reached our shores in such a sickly and debilitated state as to defy the penetration of medical skill, and to find wholly unavailing all the attentions and nursing care of their humane and faithful attendants. They landed on our shores only to find an early

grave—the only asylum for that hopeless sorrow which too often embitters a blighted and miserable existence. Hundreds of them most solemnly declared that their food consisted entirely of bad biscuit and oatmeal ; and that in many cases both of these articles were in a state not fit to feed swine, having become saturated with sea-water, and reduced to a mouldy and putrid condition. The quantity of both food and water was much too small for the multitudes on board. In many instances from six to eight hundred were huddled together in one indiscriminate mass, being double the number which the vessels were capable of accommodating with any degree of comfort or safety. I must here, my Lord, express my deep regret that men pretending to be Christians, and especially that Britons could be guilty of such barbarity, evidently for the paltry purpose of freeing themselves from the natural and just burden of assisting to support and provide for their own poor. Such an outrage on the claims of humanity, my Lord, might have been committed in the vile and heartless traffic of the slave trade, on which England has set the seal of her just reprobation, and against whose inhuman warfare she has pointed the cannon of her gallant Navy ; but that such horrible and disgusting scenes as just described should have

been enacted under the very flag which should be a protection to her unfortunate and defenceless subjects is unworthy of England, and throws a dark shade over the bright escutcheon of her well earned fame and glory. It would in my opinion have been more humane to have deprived them at once of life, than to have thus subjected them to those extreme sufferings and privations which served only to increase the fears and magnify the terrors of a painful dissolution.

I cannot here refrain from enumerating to your Lordship a few among the many instances where in the shipment of these unfortunate beings an utter disregard was had, not only to every principle of humanity, but even to those common decencies of life which Nature in the lowest depths of degradation and misfortune so scrupulously seeks to preserve. Those Emigrants from Kilkenny, Queen's County, Wicklow, and the estates of Virginia and Avon, of which Lords De-Vesci and Fitzwilliam, and Major Mahon, and Captain Wandersford are the several proprietors, were in a state of fearful destitution, as well as those from the estate of Lord Palmerston.

In confirmation of this fact, I beg leave to state to your Lordship, that a public meeting of the citizens of St. John, New Brunswick, has been recently held, at which it was resolved "to ship back to Ireland the de-

crepit, aged, and naked children and women brought to that port." These unfortunate beings constitute a part of the two shipments from Lord Palmerston's Estate at Sligo.

A copy of this Resolution has been transmitted to His Excellency the Governor General, to be forwarded to Her Majesty's Government. Comment, my Lord, is here unnecessary ; and language would be wholly inadequate to express the measure of that just indignation which such a development is calculated to inspire.

The last cargo of human beings which was received from Lord Palmerston's Estate was by the "Lord Ashburton," the captain of which but a few days since died of the prevailing fever, and consisted in all of one hundred and seventy-four men, women, and youths ; of which eighty-seven were almost in a state of nudity. No time was lost in collecting from the Military, who have on this occasion, and throughout the season been most kind and liberal, and from other sources, sufficient articles of clothing for the males ; while apparel for the females was purchased from pawnbrokers and other places. Fortunately they were generally in good health, so that the Emigrant Commissioners were enabled to have them sent off without delay to their different places of destination.

I feel gratified to be able to state to your Lordship that the people of the Province generally are disposed to welcome to the country all who may feel inclined to emigrate. They are willing to lend a helping hand to those incipient efforts of emigration which by industry and probity eventually lead to affluence and honor. They desire to see among them a vigorous and healthy population industriously employed in developing those great resources so amply possessed by Canada, in the several departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Mechanical Arts, and they confidently believe that the honest views, the moral improvement, and the immediate comfort of thousands of their fellow-countrymen at home, who now pine in want and indigence might be eminently promoted, by a removal to this portion of British North America. While however they would afford every facility to the Imperial Government in carrying into successful operation a well digested system of emigration, they at the same time must earnestly remonstrate, nay protest, against the introduction of such hordes of beggars and vagrants as have been so uncereemoniously thrust upon this young and thinly populated country. They confidently trust, my Lord, that the known humanity of Her Most Gracious Majesty, and that of Her Advisers, will induce them

without delay to take all necessary steps within their power to prevent a recurrence of the evils so justly complained of, and which form the subject of this appeal.

The fatality which has attended the course of emigration since the month of May last, cannot my Lord but be present to your mind: it presents a picture from which the eye of the Statesman, the Patriot, and the Christian turns with affright, disgust, and horror. Of the one hundred thousand human beings who left the land of their nativity to find a home in Canada, it is estimated that fifty thousand were common Paupers from the bye-lanes, Poor-houses, and pur-
lieus of large and populous cities. Of the original one hundred thousand, five thousand and upwards died on their passage to this country, and of those who landed on our shores, (so far as the returns have been collected,) upwards of twenty thousand have fallen victims to an insidious and fatal disease. The remnant now scattered over various portions of the Province have become dispirited in mind and in many instances utterly reckless of their future condition and fortunes. Those orphans who have survived the memorable visitation, remain to be provided for and educated under the fostering care of those charitable associations already filled by the indigent children of the resident poor of the several towns and cities

of Canada. A large number of our humane, wealthy, and distinguished citizens both of the Clergy and Laity, in various sections of the Province have sacrificed their useful and valuable lives in their efforts to relieve the distresses, and comfort the last hours of the sick and the dying. Such, my Lord, has been the result of emigration during the present year; and viewing the disastrous consequences which have followed in its train, I would respectfully demand of your Lordship, to what cause are we to attribute those evils which have been here so feebly depicted? How has it happened that whilst in former years when no extraordinary distress existed Parliament felt compelled to lay down regulations for vessels engaged in the business of transporting emigrants, and Her Majesty's Government appointed Agents at all the Emigrant Ports; and now when emigration has ceased to be of a healthy character, and increased vigilance and more active measures are required both on the part of Her Majesty's Government and the Provincial Parliament of the Province, no such precautions are deemed expedient? The necessary instructions, and the terms for receiving the emigrants on board of those ships which are offered as a conveyance is now left, it would seem, entirely to the cupidity and despotic cruelty of the

Captains in command, and the Ship Agents temporarily appointed.

It is a fact which cannot be questioned, my Lord, that the Government Agents were in various instances sadly deceived, and grossly imposed on by the mercenary views and artful policy of the Ship Agents, and those immediately concerned in "this inhuman traffic of flesh and blood." For days before the emigrants were admitted on board, the vessels destined to receive them were anchored in the stream, having been previously furnished with a large quantity of materials and workmen actively employed for the express purpose of erecting additional berths. In some vessels two extra tiers from deck to deck were added, into which all ages, sexes, and conditions, were indiscriminately forced. The pleadings of humanity were stifled by the cannibal cravings of that rapacity which rejoiced in the anticipation that it was about to receive two pounds per head for every additional victim.

From this overcrowding of the ships, and the absence of proper accommodation, it is easy to perceive that not only great inconvenience but much severe suffering must have ensued to those who were compelled by poverty and destitution to place themselves in the hands of rapacious and unprincipled sharpers.

To whatever causes the present defects in

the plan of emigration may be attributed, it is to be hoped, my Lord, that Her Majesty's Government will wisely profit by the sad consequences which have resulted from the injudicious and arbitrary measures pursued both by the Landed Proprietors and their mercenary Agents; and that they will avail themselves of those facilities which may be offered by the people of Canada and other portions of Her Majesty's North American Colonies to secure a more humane, liberal and beneficial plan of emigration than that which has heretofore been attempted. I confidently entertain the hope, my Lord, that the subject will receive at your hands that favorable and earnest consideration which its high importance demands; and that the same ability, wisdom and firmness which have been displayed by your Lordship on other subjects not less important to the interests and prosperity of this infant Province, will be attracted to the subject of this communication.

I have the honor to be,

With the highest consideration,

Your Lordship's

Most obed't. humble serv't.,

ADAM FERRIE.

Montreal, 1st December, 1847.

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